

2021 Florida Forever Five-Year Plan

***Caloosahatchee Ecoscape***

Summary of Recommendations and Status  
as of  
December 2020



Division of State Lands  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection



## Caloosahatchee Ecoscape

Critical Natural Lands Project

Glades, Hendry

### Project-at-a-Glance

Year Added to Priority List	1998
Project Acres	20,663
Acquired Acres	7,807
Cost of Acquired Acres	\$2,320,700
Remaining Project Acres	12,856
2019 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres	\$63,052,021

### Purpose for State Acquisition

In order to preserve Florida panthers and black bears, large landscape linkages of land must be protected. Although large areas are protected to the south within Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park, both the panther and bear populations are dependent on much of the proposed ranch land in Hendry County. This 18,387-acre project connects at its southern boundary by an abandoned rail corridor with the Okaloacoochee Slough project.

### Manager(s)

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

### General Description

The project has a mosaic of wet prairies, cypress basin and dome swamp, mesic flatwoods, wet flatwoods, depressional marshes, and scrub. The majority of the natural communities on the properties have been impacted by clearing and drainage from improved pasture development or farming. Despite the disturbed plant communities, the project provides important habitat for a variety of listed wildlife species. Most of the land is within the Barron Water Control District and canals have altered the natural hydrology to the extent that no significant natural water resources remain. Eleven archaeological sites are known from the project area, some with



material dated back to the Archaic period. This project qualifies as a wildlife management area with uses such as hunting, various sorts of trails, camping, and picnicking, among other activities.

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida panther	G5T1/S1
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Florida scrub-jay	G2?/S2
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Mangrove fox squirrel	G5T2/S2
Crested caracara	G5/S2
Bald eagle	G5/S3

*7 rare species are associated with the project*

## Public Use

This project qualifies as a wildlife management area with uses such as hunting, various sorts of trails, camping, and picnicking, among other activities.

## Acquisition Planning

### *1998*

The initial proposal is 16,055 acres. The three largest ownerships, IMC Agrico, Floriland Dairy (Milicevic) and Atlantic Gulf Communities, are designated essential. The owners of the Floriland Dairy tract (Milicevic) have indicated they would consider negotiating a Less-Than-Fee sale at some time in the future.

### *1999*

On March 26, 1999, the Council added 2,400 acres to the project.

### *2002*

In 2002, a conservation easement was placed on the LaBelle Ranch (2,994 acres for \$2,320,700).

### *2008*

On June 13, 2008, the Acquisition and Restoration Council moved the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape project to the A List of Florida Forever projects to expedite acquisition.

### *2009*

On November 4, 2009, Panther Passage Conservation Bank Conservation Easement (1,292 acres) was purchased and is managed by FWC.



## **2011**

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Critical Natural Lands category.

## **2020**

On June 12, 2020, the ARC approved the Amtel Farms addition of 2,207-acres in Glades and Hendry County to the project boundary.

On December 11, 2020, the ARC approved the removal of 2,213-acres in Glades and Hendry County from the project boundary.

## **Coordination**

TNC is considered an acquisition partner.

## **Management Policy Statement**

The project area has been highly impacted by timbering and other clearing for farming and grazing. A management goal will be to restore and maintain native plant and animal communities to the extent feasible. A secondary goal will be to provide compatible, nature-based recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking and nature study.

## **Management Prospectus**

### ***Qualifications for state designation***

The project will provide a refuge for threatened animals like the Florida panther and black bear, sandhill crane, wood stork, and crested caracara, and a variety of other endangered species, as well as species of special concern. It will protect habitat for game species like white-tailed deer and turkey as well as provide the public with a large area for natural-resource-based recreation. The project is also within an area where the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has conducted significant panther and bear research.

### ***Manager***

FWC is designated as manager.

### ***Conditions affecting intensity of management***

Hydrologic manipulation and conversion of native range to improved pastures will require habitat restoration. Urbanization within, and adjacent to, the proposed project boundary will require that any large-scale controlled burning efforts be coordinated between appropriate state and federal agencies and the local affected residents.



*Timetable for implementing management and provisions for security and protection of infrastructure*

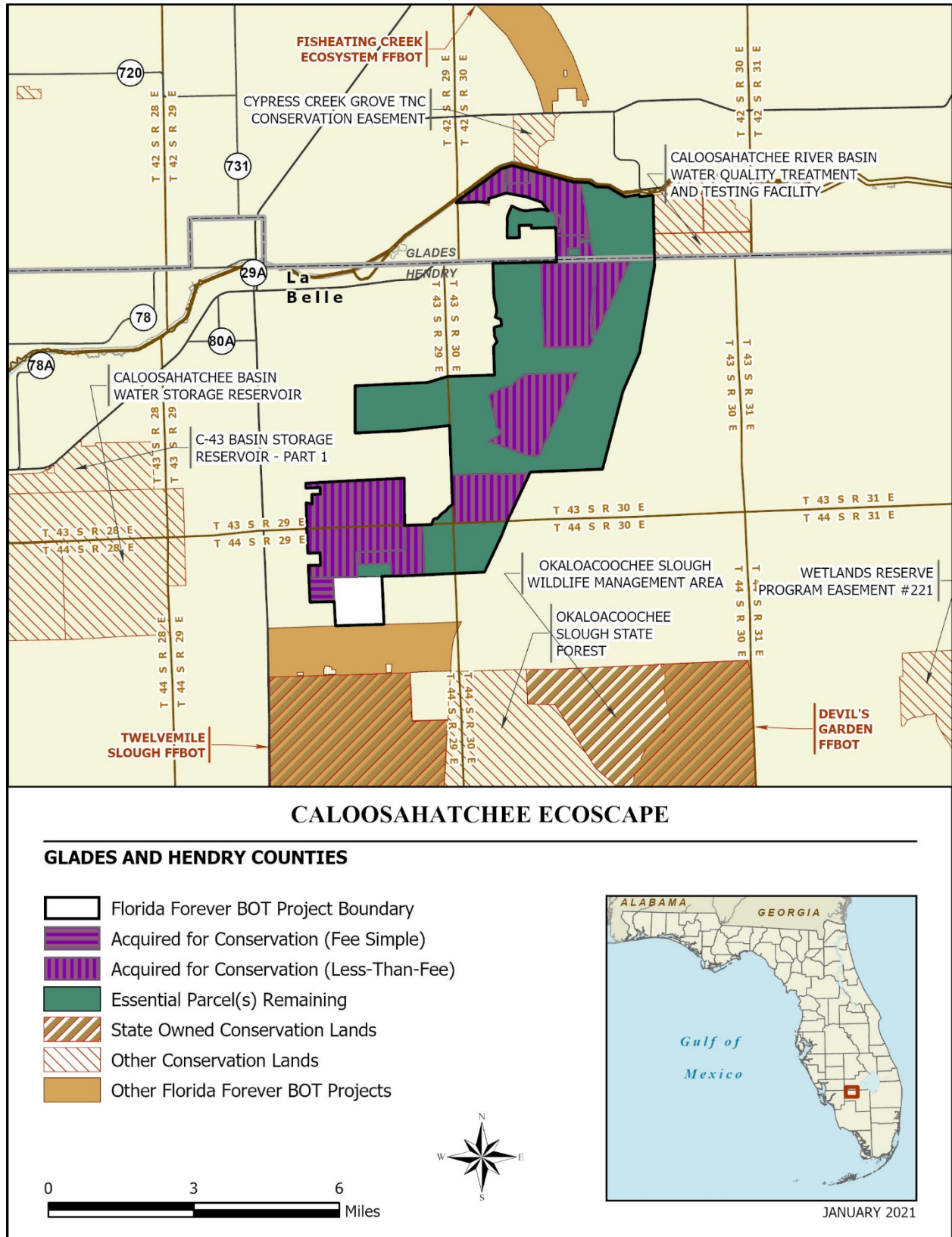
During the first year after acquisition, posting the boundary, erecting entrance signs, and resource inventory will be a priority. A conceptual management plan will also be written. Location and control of exotic plant species will be ongoing. The long-term management goals shall be to restore and maintain native plant and animal communities to the extent feasible, with a secondary goal of providing compatible nature-based recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking and nature study. Establishment of access and other facilities necessary for approved nature-based recreational activities will be developed as funding permits.

*Revenue-generating potential*

This property has historically provided timber and cattle production. Potential revenue sources may include hunting, fishing, ecotourism, cattle grazing, and sustainable timber production.

*Cooperators in management activities*

The FWC will cooperate with other federal, state and local governmental agencies and non-profit organizations in managing the area. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers presently maintains a campground and the locks at Ortona, along the northeastern corner of the Caloosahatchee Ecoscape project boundary.



Map 1 : FNAI, January 2021